

C. H. S.

BANDWAGON

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25c



John Robinson at Radford, Virginia, in 1921

(See story Page 11)

— The Circusiana Magazine —

CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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The Editor Says

A recent article has come to our attention, saying that the last circus was in danger of closing. There are, and always will be, a number of very fine small circuses that will carry on the tradition of the circus as we love it. I enjoy every circus performance, but I love the back yard of a small show, where in a couple of hours you can know everyone and everyone knows you, and it is with reluctance that you see the tent drop and you know it is time to go home.

The officers of the C.H.S. are very pleased with the response to the dues notices sent out the first of May. The percentage that have paid is very high. If any of you have overlooked sending them in, do so at once so that our records can be kept up-to-date.

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Ohio Circus Fans Keep Glamorous Big Top Alive in Collections, Models and Pictures

By Grace Goulder

"Reprinted from Cleveland Plain Dealer Sunday Pictorial Magazine." March 18, 1956

Everybody loves a circus. But not everybody is so devoted as to gather 4,000 circus photographs, as many more handbills, route books and posters, as well as trunks and boxes full of other "circus-ana." This describes, briefly, the circus memorabilia Harry M. Simpson has crowded into his home at Camden. Circus addicts from all over the country come to the little southwestern Ohio village to examine his collection.

Simpson is a prominent member of the Circus Fans Association, an international organization with thousands on the American roster and chapters in many European countries. Its annual convention opens today in Sarasota, Fla., home of Ringling Brothers' "Greatest Show on Earth."

A past president of the association is John W. Boyle, 1265 E. 81st Street, a Cleveland building inspector. Simpson and he also belong to the Circus Historical Society, a "highbrow" organization dedicated to research and preservation of circus lore. Both contribute to *White Tops* and the *Bandwagon*, publications of the fans' group and the historical society, respectively.

Circus fans, in other words, take the Big Show very, very seriously, though it is a hobby for practically all of them. Simpson earns his living as editor of the *Preble County News*, a weekly paper in his family for a couple of generations.

Simpson had a brief connection with a real circus. It was a good many years ago when he played sousaphone in the boys' all-state band. He left home with considerable abruptness to offer his musical services to a circus. His stay, however, was short—possibly because his editor father lacked the son's enthusiasm for clowns and bareback riders.

Though Simpson has devoted himself ever since to newspaper writing and the sober demands of job printing, circus lore pulses through his blood. He spends his vacations following circuses and is a first-name friend of many of today's performers. When the sawdust ring is short handed, he can be persuaded to take tickets or bark out the spectacular attractions of some side show.

He has been gathering circus material most of his life. His collection has items reaching to earliest days and is considered one of the best in the country. In fact, he has so much tucked away in his home that his wife admits she is not sure where all of it is. However, in a thrice he can put his finger on a route book, an elephant bangle or a photograph.

He has filed, labeled and cross indexed his possessions systematically. Are you interested in replicas of elaborate old-time wagons? Pictures of one of the famous "flying aerialists"? Or maybe you want to know about the circus pioneer, John Robinson, who 100 years and more ago introduced the "leapers," performers jumping

over horses. It brought into use the phrase "before you can say Jack Robinson."

Circus facts and figures are at the Camden editor's tongue tip. America's first circus was a horsemanship exhibition in Philadelphia attended by George Washington. Long before that the world's first big circus was being advertised in pre-Christian Rome by Pompey, who promised "500 fierce lions, 20 ponderous pachyderms, chariot races, and acrobatic feats of great daring," free, in the Circus Maximus where 150,000 spectators packed themselves into the tiers of stone seats . . .

"It has been a long road from Rome to Ringling," said Simpson. "But the circus isn't what it used to be." Street parades as a preview are out now because of traffic. Animals are becoming fewer in the circus since improved city zoos have made wild beasts commonplace. The trend is to vaudeville. Transportation moved from the rumbling wagons of the early days to railroad cars and now largely to trucks with only a couple of circuses still carried by rail. Circuses have tended to consolidate so that the small independent circus is passing.

One of the big problems facing the circus in this country today is space. Vacant lots are becoming increasingly scarce and small in size as urban development squeezes in.

Ohioans, according to Editor Simpson, are particularly numerous on the circus fan list. John C. Wyatt of Shadyside, the son of circus performers, is president of the fans' Ohio chapter, or "Top," as state groups are called. Secretary-treasurer is Floyd McClintock, Uhrichsville.

Local chapters are "Tents," and Murray Powers, managing editor of the Akron Beacon Journal, is president of Summit County's Pete Mardo Tent, named for a veteran clown who died last month. Secretary is Carl Elwell, vice president of the First National Bank, Akron. Banker Elwell has scrap books filled with thousands of the photographs he takes as he visits touring circuses.

Arthur Hendrickson, Atkins Avenue, Lakewood, one-time construction man on such buildings as the Terminal Tower, the Bell Telephone and Public Library, makes model circus wagons as a hobby.

A Massillon lawyer, Sherlock Holmes (his real name) Evans, drops legal dignity readily to become a circus man. He was born in the circus and loves the ring. His father, John J. Evans, operated a circus for 35 years until his death a few years ago. The son has recorded the story in a fictionalized biography, "Father Owned a Circus," which has gone into several editions.

The elder Evans, a Welsh coal miner in Justus, O., found he had a way with the mules and donkeys around the mine. Without half trying he could teach tricks to them and to village stray dogs. He left the mines, moved to Wooster and with a little troupe of trained animals visited county fairs. Soon he enlarged his show and operated the John J. Evans Society Circus.

Mrs. John Evans, who lives at 935 Erie Street, Massillon, learned to ride horses which were taught to dance the Charleston or the Black Bottom—names but not the steps changed. Sherlock did a "rosin

back" Roman standing jump on a pair of horses that pranced in unison, or Sherlock hit the tan bark.

His father's was the first motorized circus, but roads proved so bad that he went back to using the railroad. Evans pointed out that the American military has copied circus methods in moving troops in packing large quantities of supplies, and in the chow line.

"Everybody helps when the circus takes to the road, and again when it settles for a show," he said. "Circus folks are clannish and work together. Many acts are family affairs with children's training starting almost in the cradle. Father always stood at the tent flap and shook hands with every customer, while mother, when not in the ring, made the costumes."

Circus artistry, he believes, suffers today from the lightning pace of acts and bigness. Three-ring simultaneous offerings rob individual performers of the chance to star. "The circus, like everything else, is changing," said Evans. "But I attend every one that comes anywhere near Massillon."

Circus Queen Who Died 'Broke' Left Fortune in Jewels in Unlocked Trunk

From The Roanoke Times, Roanoke, Virginia, April 3, 1956

St. Louis (AP)—A one-time circus queen, who died apparently penniless last December, actually left a trunk full of jewels.

She was Dolly Varden, aerialist and equestrienne, once called the goddess of the tan bark trail. She died of cancer at the age of 84.

W. W. Sleater III, attorney for the estate, said today the jewels—diamonds, rubies, emeralds, gold and silver—possibly could be worth as much as \$100,000, "but we won't know the amount until an appraisal is made."

He said an appraisal will be started today or tomorrow.

DOLLY VARDEN, known to her neighbors as Mrs. Raymond O'Dell, later was active in welfare and religious work. Before going to City Hospital last fall, she left the unlocked trunk with a friend, Andrew Schrick of St. Louis.

Schrack said he didn't bother to open that trunk or another one which contained old circus costumes, before turning them over to Sleater.

Noble Edward Dyer, a cousin of Mrs. O'Dell, of St. Louis, is administrator of the estate and will receive the jewels unless another relative is found. No will has been found.

"One diamond looked like the headlight on a car," Sleater said.

Miss Varden was born in Mount Carmel, Ill., and was on the stage for 12 years before entering circus work. She once traveled in her own private railroad car and had chocolates, shoes and clothes named for her.

1956 CLYDE BEATTY CIRCUS ITEMS

SOUVENIR PROGRAMES—50 Cents

PHOTOGRAPHS

Set No. 1—12, performers, clowns in costumes, wagons.

Set No. 2—12 views different lot scenes and performers.

Set No. 3—12 photos of lithographs.

Price \$1.75 doz.; 2 doz. \$3.25; 3 doz. \$4.75

Free with 2 doz. order 8x9 enlargement, tickets, etc.

Walt Disney Circus

12 photos \$1.75 (shows old wagons back to 4 Paw)

LITHOGRAPHS

Beatty, Seils Sterling, Tom Mix, Al G. Barnes, etc.

3c stamp gets litho list.

BOB TABER

3668 COMER AVE., RIVERSIDE, CALIF.

Word has been received of the death of the mother of Francis Graham, of Dixon, Illinois. Mrs. Graham died in January. Our sympathy is extended to Francis and other members of the family.

Frank Cowen of Oshkosh, Wisconsin, died February 29th. He was the father of Cliff Cowen, C.H.S. member. Mr. Cowen worked for the Wisconsin Power and Light Company for fifty years.

March 11th issue of the PITTSBURGH PRESS carried a two-page illustrated article concerning Burns M. Kattenberg and his collection, entitled "Connoisseur of Contortion." The article was by Roy Kohler, staff writer.

Burns, assistant manager of the Fort Pitt Hotel, is a former member of The Circus Historical Society and possesses the largest collection on contortionist in the world.

Acrobats and Leapers

By Vivienne Mars, Curator
Harry Hertzberg Circus Collection
San Antonio Public Library

It all looks so easy! It isn't. When you see a group of beautifully formed, graceful, vital people fairly lilt from the back door to the ring before you—only those who know can appreciate what has gone before.

First: Careful choice is made by trainers whose keen judgment classifies the pupil. Briefly, there are special aptitudes which qualify individuals for "carpet" (ground) fixed bar or leaping. Some artists have been found who are capable of all three. Basic exercises are begun, often when quite young; and practice from that moment continues throughout the professional life of the acrobat.

Breasting the bar, circling the bar, upstarts, cutaways, swings, falls, somersaults-backward, forward-single, double, triple. The last named is in the nature of an engraved invitation to Death. Yet many young, enthusiastic and ambitious men have dreamed of reaching this goal of perfection in their work. Many marvelous acrobat-leapers however, have lived longer than average lives. George H. Batcheller (1827-1913); Robert (Bob) Theodore Stickney (1846-1928), and George H. Kelley (1841-1921) and John Worland (Juan Comash) (1855-1933).

It was in the late '70's that leaping changed from its original ground "vault" to an elevated running board. The latter was almost like fancy diving, with the rather important difference that the leaper landed on a mat instead of in comparatively safe water. Some of the greatest were performing at this time. "Big Red" Quigley and Alex Siebert presented their double-twisting-double-somersaults over the backs of stock such as horses, camels or elephants.

In this decade, we have been told (I almost said "sold") that leapers 'flew through the air' over the backs of twenty to twenty-two elephants. I discover that at this time (1879-1881) Sells Brothers led the field with eight elephants. Forepaugh added nine "dancing elephants" to his herd of five, shortly after 1881. Forepaugh and Sells combined in 1896 with nineteen elephants. They had elephants—true—but not one leaper on the bill.

One would think it quite wonderful enough to be able to do a double and land on "dry land" without a broken neck or back, with or without even one elephant. George Miller managed the triple two times. His neck was broken as he landed after the third attempt. Johnny Aymar lost his life in a similar accident. William Hobbes died at his first attempt to do the triple and Dick Beswick and Fred O'Brien were both seriously injured doing doubles in 1877. O'Brien died of his injuries.

Perhaps the greatest of these leapers was Juan Comash, known as John Worland. Time after time Worland is said to have accomplished the triple somersault and lived! Twice he landed standing upright. This is almost unbelievable and it is just possible that some

were not too anxious to believe it. There were whispers of "fraud." Worland proved his claim before the Mayor of New Haven and a huge audience, in a public performance—and what a performance! The leap was executed in perfect form and this was one of the two times Worland landed gracefully ON HIS FEET. It is declared that affidavits attesting to the truth of this record were made but some are not convinced, even now.

And WHY is the triple somersault so dangerous. Why have so many men been terribly injured or have met death doing this difficult but beautiful feat? Circus performers (bless them) do so many difficult, beautiful and dangerous acts every performance that many have wondered why the leapers have disappeared completely. The explanation which sounds most reasonable to me, at least, is this:

After two turns a momentary black-out occurs. Gravity takes over and pulls the (heavier) head foremost and down as the body falls. Only seconds are allowed and there is no time to "catch" before landing. The head strikes and the neck or back—or both—are broken.

Since those days from time to time the public has asked that the leapers be brought back. Personally, I hope no one ever tries it again. Many times while fascinated by other breathtaking acts (and believe me, we still have many of them), I've found myself "watching" with my eyes closed and saying a fervent prayer that they wouldn't fall. THEY are not afraid—but I AM!

We find the name COMASH spelled two different ways, i.e., COMOSH and COMASH. Does anyone have authentic information as to which is correct?

"IN AN EMERGENCY—THEY ALL CALL LASCOFF'S PHARMACY IN NEW YORK"

"Dr. Lascoff likes to recall the time he answered the phone and heard a deep masculine voice ask for eight ounces of Catnip Oil.

"What on earth do you want that for?" he inquired.

"To hunt lions," the voice answered in most casual tones.

It was Martin Johnson, the African explorer.

—David B. Johnson, In Cornet Magazine, Sept., 1947.

VACATION NOTE

Anyone visiting Canada this summer, or any time for that matter, will enjoy visiting Ed Cripps Hobby Shop. Ed is a member of C. H. S., and is most helpful in keeping us posted on what is going on in Canada. The Hobby Shop will be found at 50 George St., Brantford, Ontario.

With The Greatest Show On Earth

(OLEANDER'S THIRD LETTER)

By John G. Quinius

Written in 1900 by John G. Quinius. Furnished the Band Wagon by his son Herman M. Quinius, CFA of Bette Leonard Tent, Wichita, Kansas. Please note these stories were written and published for childrens entertainment over 55 years ago.

This will be the last letter I'll write you from New York, for tomorrow we begin to travel toward the west, the end of our journey being San Francisco. Perhaps the management at the very last moment will decide to make the southern trip. If so, we'll have our last stand and exhibition at New Orleans instead of near the Golden Gate. I don't care where they go, just so we get started, for the "travel fever" is in the air, and I, as well as nearly all those connected with our show, am getting restless and anxious to be once more on the move and on the road.

One of the departments of which we are very proud is our grand and large collection of birds, and these I'm going to describe to you in this letter. I suppose it will be only proper to put the Bald Eagle at the head of the list, because the people of the United States have adopted this bird as the emblem of our Republic, no doubt having honored him thus because the White-headed, or as more commonly known, Bald Eagle, is the most beautiful of all the eagle tribe. The first year of his life his color is a bluish gray, the second and third year changing to light and dark brown, and during the fourth year becoming perfect in plumage, namely, a dark brown, with white head and tail, and eyes of a straw color, his beak and feet and claws also being of this straw color. When full grown, he is generally three feet long and measures about seven feet from tip to tip of wing when fully outstretched. The male is usually a trifle smaller than the female, and, strange to say, less daring than his mate. This trait, however, is common to all birds of prey, the females of all being more brave, aggressive, and bold than the males.

Next, I'll describe the White or Whooping Crane, of which we have two fine specimens. When at home, these cranes live in the salt marshes and desolate swamps of the South, and none of the crane family is taller or statelier or more beautiful, their fine white and creamy plumage, with black legs and bald forehead, and fluffy tail, making them "pleasant to look upon." Some of the people down South say that at times these cranes assembly in great numbers, and like an army of soldiers, form in line, each one standing stock still, stiff and erect. Suddenly one of their number will step out, open his wings, and begin dancing before the assembled hosts. This dancing the people call "preaching." Another peculiar thing about the White or Whooping Crane is that when young they are brown instead of white. I'm glad the cranes do not speak often, for their voice is loud and piercing, not unlike the cry of a hound.

Of owls we have quite a collection, and when the Great Horned Owl cries, "Waugh O! waugh O!" all the other birds look startled.

Another funny sound he sometimes amuses us with is one that sounds like the cackling of an old rooster who is running to save his life with the cook of the household pursuing him with fire in her eye and a hatchet in her hand. I understand that the harshness of the owl's cry is caused by the width of his throat. None of the birds of prey, however, has a beautiful voice. Every one of you has seen owls, so I'll not describe them further.

Now, I'll call your attention to the swans in the next cage, one pair of white, one pair of black. These, although the most graceful of birds when gliding and swimming about on a body of water, look very uncouth and helpless in their cage of wood and wire. Their voices sound like trumpets, and I suppose that is why one of the white varieties is called the Trumpeter Swan; the other kind, very similar in looks and color of feather, being called the Whistling Swan. Generally, wherever there is an artificial lake connected with a city or public park, the place is not considered complete without a few swans, for the boys and girls all like them and love to feed them, and the grown-up folks like to watch them and see them dive and swim.

Last year when we were showing in Boston, the city of culture and baked beans, our largest ostrich swallowed a spike which an Irishman had offered him. The iron in the food didn't agree with him, and from the way he acts, there's "something on his breast" even yet. The man who cares for him and his mate had to hobble this big ostrich's legs to keep him from kicking and clawing everybody in sight. This hobbling is only done, however, when the pair is shown in the open near the elephants and camels. When they are in their cage, his legs are freed from their shackles, and he can kick as much as he pleases. No doubt he often thinks of the time he used to spend running over the sands of the deserts, or of the glimpse he got of the big ostrich farm near Los Angeles, as we were speeding homeward last year through California.

I wish I had time to write more about this large California ostrich farm, where so many of the beautiful ostrich plumes we see the ladies wearing come from. I am sure, also, that you would be interested to know how the Boers of South Africa raise great families of ostriches much as we raise chickens. Perhaps I can write you about this later, just now the time allotted me for the writing of this letter will not permit it.

In closing I am just going to mention a class of birds which are so well known to you that it will not be necessary to describe them. These are the geese, ducks, chickens, pea fowls, guinea fowls, and pigeons. We have in our collection six varieties of geese, twelve kinds of ducks, twenty-five different breeds of chickens, white and colored pea fowls, brown, pearl, and white guinea fowls, and pigeons in size from the very smallest parlor tumbler to the very largest and longest pouter.

Good-bye! I'll write you next from Philadelphia, the city of peace and good will.

Robinson's At Radford

See picture on front cover (Taken by the Author)

Circus Day at Radford, Virginia, August 24, 1921, arrived simultaneously with the so-called "Great Radford Fair." So the "free acts," the races, and the carnival of the fair were all suspended for one day, while John Robinson's spread their canvas in the middle of the race track and took over the crowds for the exhibition of their circus.

The day dawned cloudy with a heavy fog over the city and show grounds, which did not lift until the afternoon. A large crowd of people were in attendance and the circus put on a grand show after having an excellent parade downtown.

The show was advertised as carrying 1,000 people and 500 horses, which, of course, I made no attempt to verify, but a personal inventory of the parade found the following animals in the lineup: 9 elephant trumpeted gleefully and lumbered off. mus, led animals and open cages or dens.

—A. Robert Hall

Perhaps Elephants Do Remember

Sent in by A. Robert Hall

An experience similar to the one Androcles had with the lion befell a hunter in Africa. He encountered an elephant limping from something which had entered his foot. The hunter managed to get close enough to the elephant to extract a sharp-pointed stone. The elephant trumpeted gleefully and lumbered off.

A few years later, back in civilization the hunter attended a circus. When the elephants rumbled on to the sawdust with their earth-trembling dance, the third elephant from the last spotted his Good Samaritan, broke formation and headed for the man. He picked him up out of his \$2.20 seat and carried him over to the center and put him down gently in the \$3.30 section.

—Printopics.

A MUSICAL NOTE

"I wonder if all fans have reacted to the change in policy on music for the Big One as I have. When I heard violins in a circus band I was practically sick. I am a musician and appreciate good music including fine string sections, but the old Circus Music needs no change. I hope Mr. North reverses his trend." Writes W. S. Rauth, Jeffersonville, Ind.

1956 Convention

PERU, INDIANA

August 10-11-12

Since writing you a letter recently, many new things have been arranged for the Peru Convention. We have a tentative promise from a circus to be there. Of course we cannot at this time mention the name of the circus. And, of course there may be circumstances arise that will make a change imperative. We also have been in touch with 2 other circuses—so it seems quite possible that one of them will be there.

As we told you in the letter—PLEASE—get your reservation in early at the Bearss Hotel. This is very important, if you are to be assured of a room. We are informed that a number of reservations are in already. Why don't you do this today?

More important though—will you be there? We surely want to have as many as possible at the Convention. Everyone has a lot of real fun at these affairs. We cannot get the most out of a Convention if we do not have YOU there. So—give it another thought—and get with us if you possibly can.

In our letter we mentioned that the Cole Bros. baggage wagons are stored at Paul Kelly's place. We are now in receipt of information that these wagons are going to be destroyed. So if you want to see them—maybe this will be your last chance.

We will keep you informed as time goes by, on what we will have and do in Peru. We want to make this a real big one.

**WE NEED YOU—SO ON AUGUST 10-11-12
BE IN PERU.**